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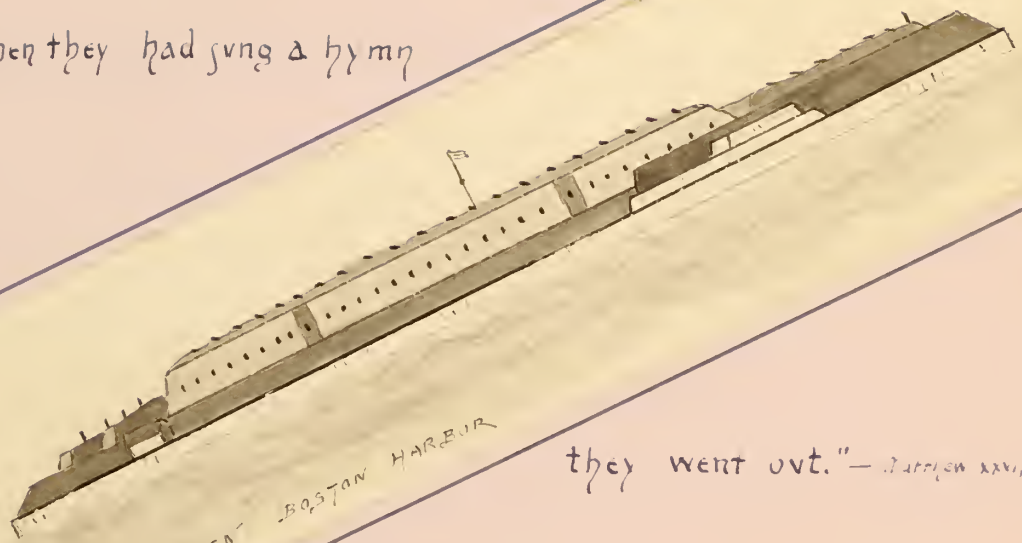
"And when they had sung a hymn



FORT WARREN - BOSTON HARBOR

they went out." — Matthew xxvi, 30.

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A Famous War Song.

A Paper read before

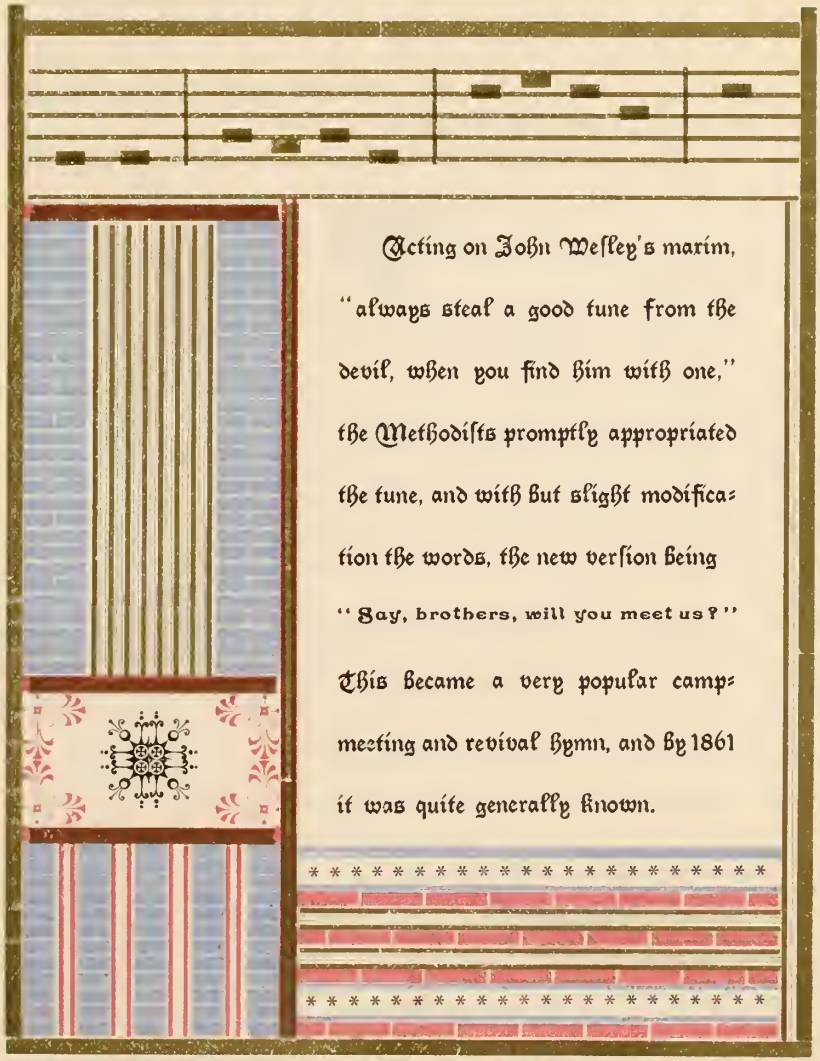
The United Service Club, Phila.,

by James Beale,

late of 12th Mass. Vol. Infantry,

"Webster Regiment."

SOMEWHERE in the late "fifties" a fire-company in Charleston, S. C., commissioned a Philadelphia musician to write a "chantez" for their use on a proposed excursion. They received a song, the opening words of which were

"Say, bummers, will you meet us?"

Acting on John Wesley's maxim, "always steal a good tune from the devil, when you find him with one," the Methodists promptly appropriated the tune, and with but slight modification the words, the new version being "Say, brothers, will you meet us?" This became a very popular camp-meeting and revival hymn, and by 1861 it was quite generally known.

THE firing on Sumter and consequent rally to arms caused Fort Warren, Boston Harbor, to be occupied by a military force, the Second Battalion of Massachusetts Infantry, commonly known as the "Tigers." They found the Fort in a very unfinished state, work on it having been stopped when Jefferson Davis was Secretary of War, and as a natural

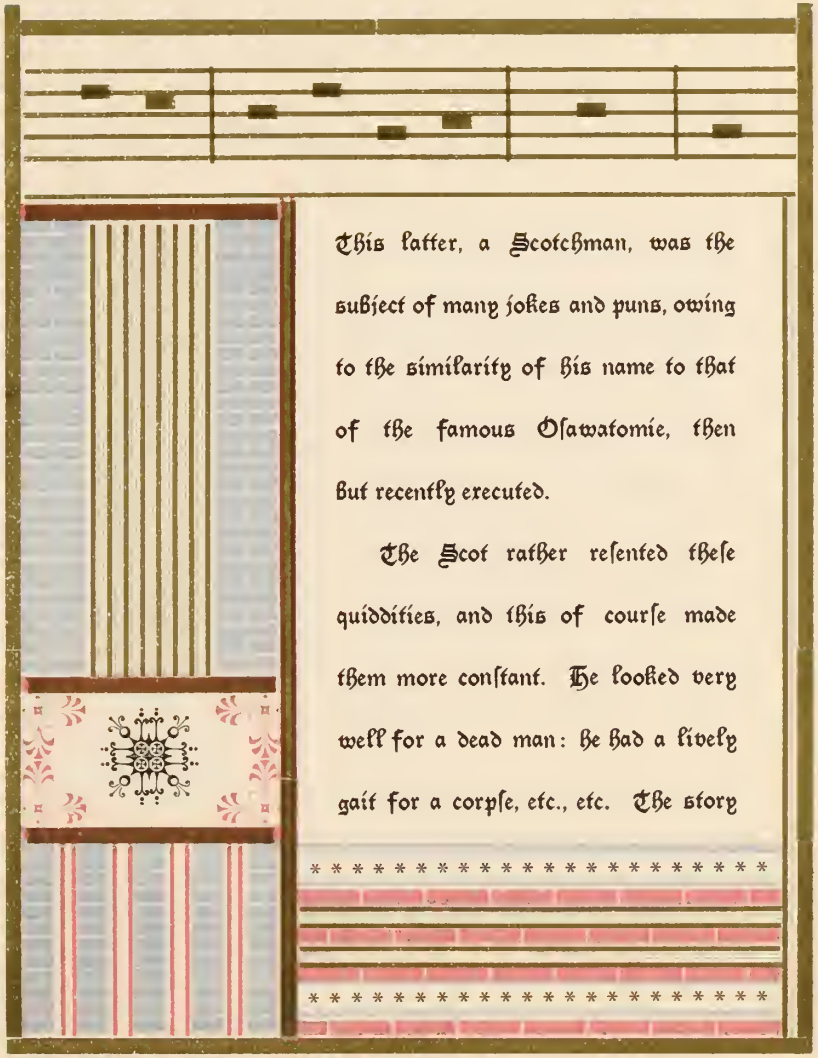
result "fatigue-parties" were very numerous. After the day's work was over a favorite amusement was singing, for there were some excellent voices in the company, notably one quartette

Chas. E. B. Edgerly,

James Jenkins,

Newton J. Burnette,

John Brown.



This latter, a Scotchman, was the subject of many jokes and puns, owing to the similarity of his name to that of the famous Osawatomie, then but recently executed.

The Scot rather resented these quiddities, and this of course made them more constant. He looked very well for a dead man: he had a lively gait for a corpse, etc., etc. The story

goes that one evening, when two of this quartette were returning to the Fort — John Brown and the other being seated near the sally-port — the query was shouted, "What's the news?" Promptly came the retort, "Why, John Brown 's dead." Some one added, "Yet he still goes marching round."

Unlike a rolling stone, the ideas

gathered as the changes were rung on them, and by dark the camp-meeting tune had undergone revision, for the "Tigers" were chanting

John Brown's body lies a-mouldering in the grave,
But his soul goes marching on.

May 25, 1861, the "Tigers" left Fort Warren, but as on May 7 the Twelfth Massachusetts Volunteers

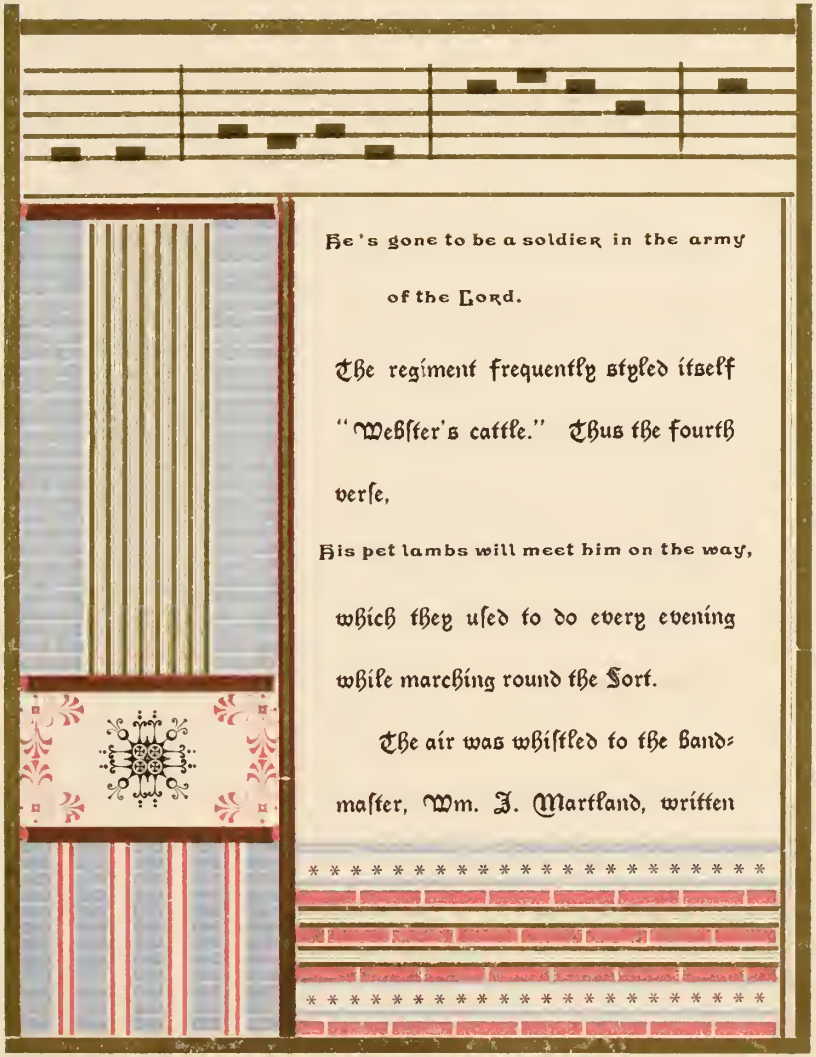
had reached the Fort, many of the "Tigers" enlisted in the Twelfth or "Webster Regiment," the quartette separating:

Jenkins and Brown to Company A, Purnette and Edgerly to Company E, all four being sergeants.

Of course they carried their song with them, and it became the fashion after dress-parade for the regiment to

strike up the song and march around the parade-ground. Thus the second verse,

John Brown's knapsack's strapped
upon his back,
As we go marching on.

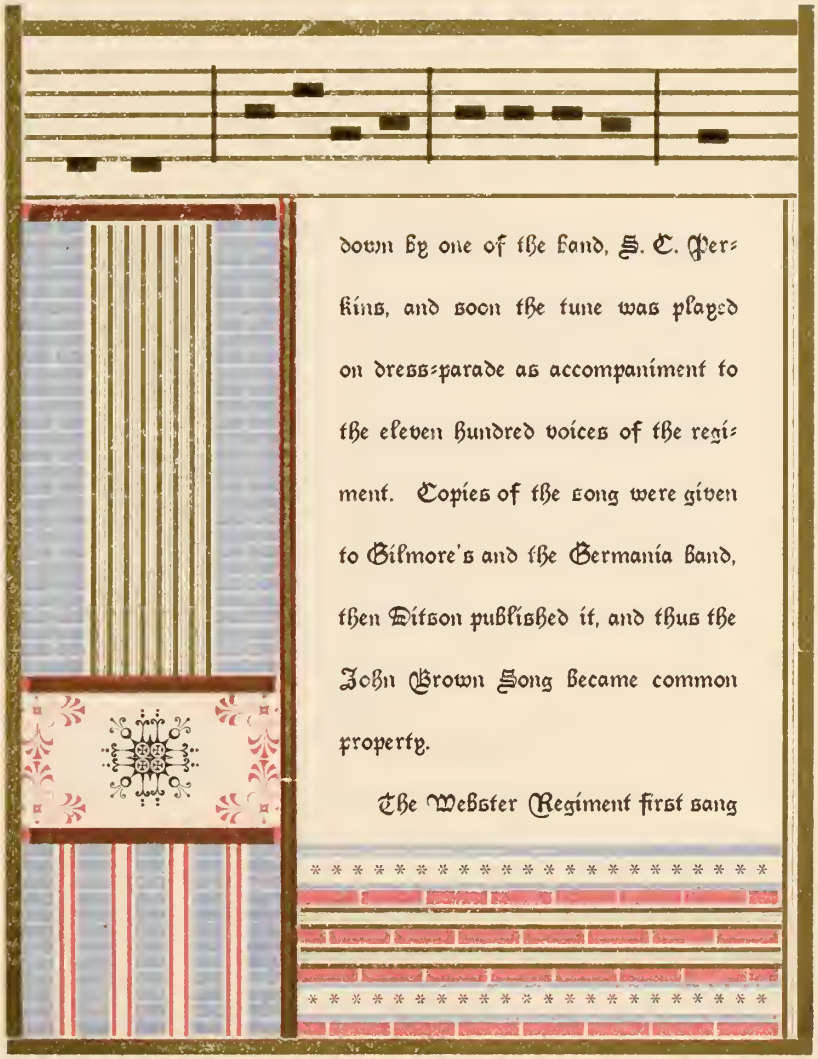
Chaplains in those days were very fond of styling the Volunteers "the army of the Lord." So the third verse,

He's gone to be a soldier in the army of the Lord.

The regiment frequently styled itself "Webster's cattle." Thus the fourth verse,

His pet lambs will meet him on the way,

which they used to do every evening while marching round the Fort.

The air was whistled to the bandmaster, Wm. J. Markland, written

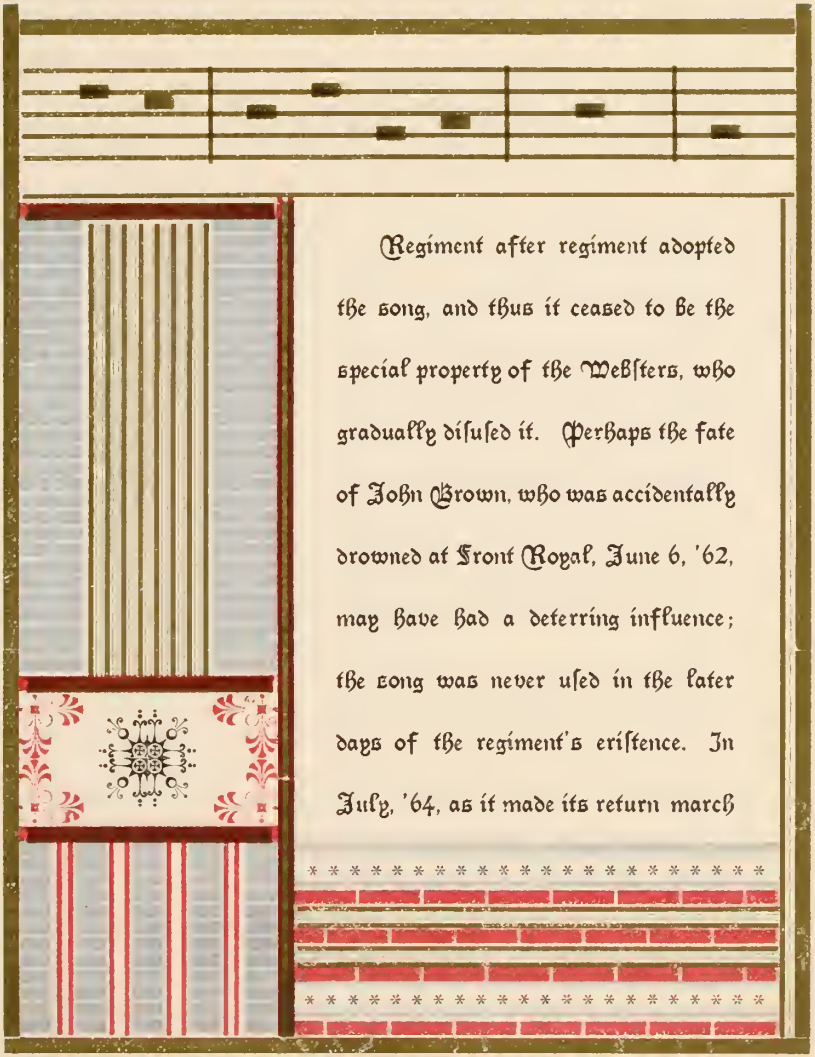


down by one of the band, S. C. Perkins, and soon the tune was played on dress-parade as accompaniment to the eleven hundred voices of the regiment. Copies of the song were given to Gilmore's and the Germania band, then Ditson published it, and thus the John Brown Song became common property.

The Webster Regiment first sang

it in Boston July 18, 1861, when their colors were presented by Hon. Edward Everett; leaving Boston July 23, on the nert day they electrified New York City with the weird chorus; Baltimore heard it on July 26; and on March 1, 1862, at Charlestown, Va., on the spot where Osawatomie was hanged, the Webster Regiment sang

John Brown's body.



Regiment after regiment adopted the song, and thus it ceased to be the special property of the Websters, who gradually disused it. Perhaps the fate of John Brown, who was accidentally drowned at Front Royal, June 6, '62, may have had a deterring influence; the song was never used in the later days of the regiment's existence. In July, '64, as it made its return march

through the streets of Boston, eighty-five men in all — Company A being represented by three — an effort was made to revive the old chorus: it was promptly frowned down, and silently, but with soldierly tread, the Webster Regiment passed into history.

Two of the survivors of the quartette are yet in Boston. The third was in the West, but has not lately been

heard from. Only one — Burnette — was mustered out with the regiment.

Poor old Osawatomie Brown! Despised and forsaken, on his way to execution he kissed a negro child, prophesying speedy freedom to all its race. The veil of futurity was to him but partly lifted: he dreamed not of the

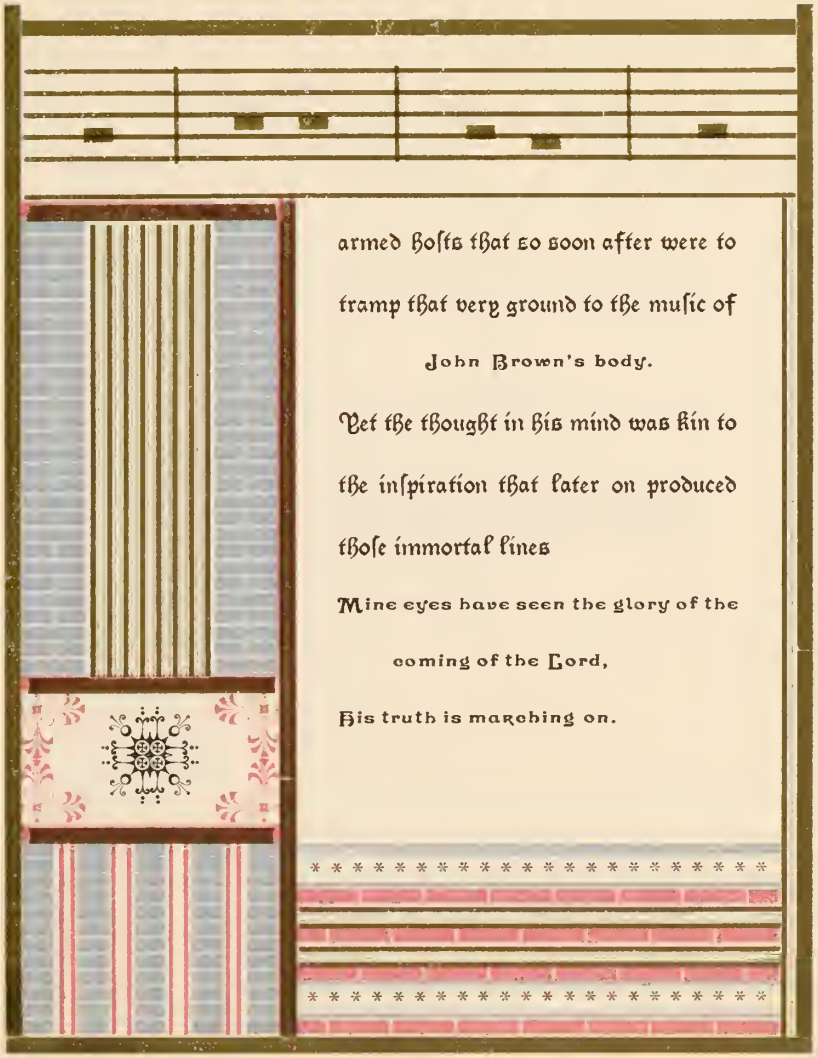
armed hosts that so soon after were to tramp that very ground to the music of

John Brown's body.

Yet the thought in his mind was kin to the inspiration that later on produced those immortal lines

Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord,

His truth is marching on.



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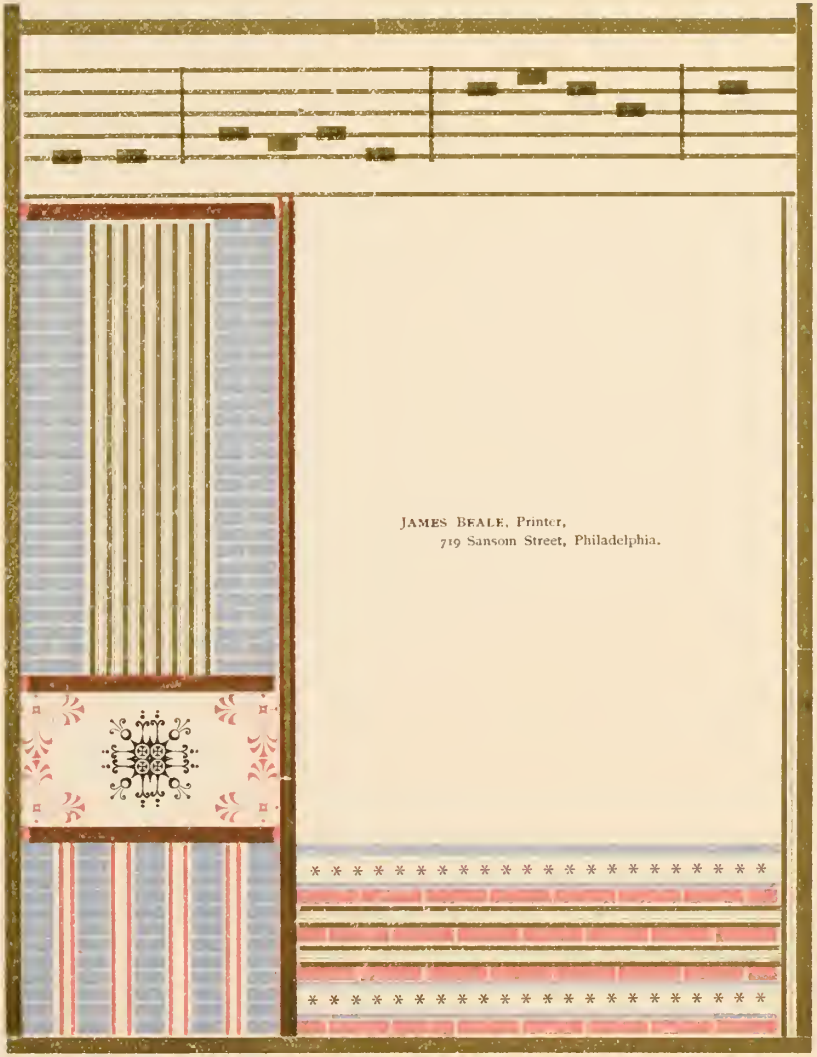

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